

## *Editorial Department.*

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IN this issue of the JOURNAL two papers appear, which rather sharply criticize the management of Asylums for the Insane, from various points of view, and also, in some respects the workings and past policy of the *Association of Asylum Superintendents*, in this country. The chief aims of the writers of the articles in question (to which we invite the attention of our readers), appear to be to discuss administrative reforms in the conduct of our asylums, to point out and denounce the practical misapplication of the vast funds contributed by State and municipal bodies for the support of the insane, and to animadvernt on the low scientific state of American Psychiatry, as compared with that of other countries, or with the actual privileges for scientific investigation enjoyed by many Superintendents of Asylums for the Insane; and finally, to rebuke the apparently exclusive spirit which has for a long period *seemed* to pervade the Association of Superintendents as regards not only the profession in general, but even in respect to talented assistants in the asylums, and other eminent and capable members of the profession whose only lack of qualification to a place in the Association seems to have been or to be the absence of official relation as chief to an asylum. To set forth these points seem to have been the principal aims of the authors of the papers referred to.

As regards the first point, viz.: administrative reforms, the question is too large and too complicated for discussion within narrow limits. But we presume no well informed and thinking official of experience in practical asylum management would deny that reforms in this domain are not only possible, but needed. In the present state of this class of questions, it is difficult to discuss them from the outside, without giving

some color to the suspicion that the animus of the discussion is a personal one.

The discussion of the modes of managing the complicated and delicate interests of thousands of our fellow-citizens, who have been brought into that pitiable state in which it becomes necessary to deprive them in some manner of their personal liberty of action, can hardly be carried on, even in the most euphemistic manner, without arousing,—perhaps quite naturally,—the feeling that the fate, or at least the reputation of a *man*, is involved with that of his *method*. His competency or his integrity, one or both, are seemingly involved, and under such circumstances a discussion must be burdened as a rule with painful difficulties. The only way to avoid them is by a reform which will secure a thoughtful division of responsibility, instead of concentrating it so nearly in the hands of one man. This has been done in other countries, and should be done in all, especially our own. The closest and most intelligent *scientific* (not political or simply financial) supervision, should be exercised over all our great Asylums for the Insane. Until this is accomplished there will be ground for suspicion, and there ought to be intelligent and unsparing criticisms of all real or apparent administrative deficiencies and abuses, but we cannot now discuss these questions. We may return to them in the future.

As regards the second point—*the misapplication of funds contributed for the support of the insane*—we cannot speak too strongly. We now refer to the expenditure of sums of money, exceeding one thousand dollars per patient, in providing quarters for the pauper insane.

Thus, while one-third of the insane of a State may be provided for in a palace, the other two-thirds are permitted to drag out a simply horrible existence in county almshouses and jails, or remain a private burden. No defense of the thoughtless extravagance practiced in provision for the insane in almost every State from Maine to Texas can be made, which can stand for a moment in the presence of the solemn and distressing facts which we have now under our hands touching this subject. Almost any criticism, however severe or per-

sonal, whoever it may be directed against, which may contribute to thoroughly arousing the public to a clear recognition of the gross and ignorant misapplications which have been made of the large funds contributed for the support of the insane, seems justifiable. But this is a subject, also, to which we expect to give detailed attention in the near future.

As to the third point or that of the present scientific state of American Psychiatry, criticism is eminently in place. None have a higher intelligent respect than we have for the gentlemen as a body, who now occupy the positions of chiefs of our asylums for the insane.

Among them are men who have adorned the medical profession, and would adorn any. But the low state at which scientific medicine has been, and yet is, in general, in this country, does not find an exception among our alienists as a body. But what makes the low scientific state of American Psychiatry so deplorable, is its high and difficult character as compared with other branches of medicine, and the comparatively bad results, which arise to the individual from incompetency, or a lack of faithfulness to so high a trust. There are but few medical men in the profession who have such control and closeness of relation to their patients as are enjoyed by the chiefs of asylums for the insane. There are no other positions, which require on the part of those who fill them, higher scientific qualifications. We do not now speak of the severity of the test to which the confidence of friends is subjected, when they consign members of their own families to the practically absolute control of those who may be to them entire strangers. We do not now speak of the legal and other disadvantages of the insane, in relation to those who have control of them. These are necessary incidents of the situation, and it is greatly to the credit of the authorities at asylums, that so few real abuses of authority are reported, when the opportunities are so great. But we now have in mind the exceptionally high requirements implied in the case of those who are charged with the medical care of the insane, and *per contra*, the exceptionally low state, of a truly scientific Psychiatry in this country. There can be no possible doubt but that too little zeal in behalf of the scientific aspect of this noble de-

partment of medicine, has been shown by American alienists as a body. As already intimated, there have been striking individual exceptions to these statements. Among them we may name Drs. Gray and Kempster. However much their methods or results may be open to criticism, the *aim* of their labors, and their industry, all should commend. But the fact still remains, that the same lethargy, which affects the whole profession as regards its higher scientific duties and labors, affects our body of alienists, and we see no reason why this state of things should not be the subject of searching criticism.

With such views we can commend the general aims of the authors of the articles we publish, though not necessarily approving in every instance, the phraseology or modes of statement.

As to the last point,—the alleged exclusiveness of the Asylum Association, in its relations to the profession at large—so far as it is true, it is unfortunate to say the least. We doubt not it will soon disappear, in emulation of the less exclusive spirit of similar associations abroad.

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#### CLAUDE BERNARD.

The death of this eminent physiologist occurred February 10th of this year, from pyelo-nephritis. Notices of his decease have already appeared in various journals, in this country as well as abroad. We had prepared an extended account of his life and labors as a physiologist, but it has been crowded out for want of space. But we would not neglect the opportunity of testifying our admiration for his remarkable talents and achievements. But few men, in the history of science, have united such capacities as an investigator and thinker.

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AFTER the discussion which took place at the last meeting of the *British Medico-Psychological Association*, concerning the policy and editorship of the *Journal of Mental Science*, we were prepared to hear of the projection of a new journal, devoted to the interests of Neurological and Mental Medicine. Since the last issue of our journal, we have received the pro-